Vigilantism as 'Twilight Institution': Islamic Vigilante Groups and the State in Post-Suharto Yogyakarta

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Abstract

The paper attempts to comprehend the nexus between vigilantism, a particular form of citizenship, and identity politics within the Islamist groups active in Yogyakarta in the post-Suharto era. As numerous studies have revealed, democracy in post-Suharto Indonesia has been marked by the persistent presence of militias, gangs, vigilantism, and street politics. These groups have largely embraced ethnicity, religion, and localism as symbols upon the basis of which they claim to defend and represent specific communities. The rise of identity-based groups, which frequently break the law and disturb public order, has been portrayed as the emergence of 'uncivil society' elements that are challenging state authority and threatening democratic values and the very foundations of civil society. Without rejecting a certain degree of fact within these studies, this article suggests that these explanations have failed to understand the complexity of such groups and the reason for their persistence in local political landscapes.

This article argues that such groups have exercised a form of citizenship that is characterised by the mobilisation of local support, patronage politics, and discourses of localised 'Islamic populism'. In this regard, it suggests that the prominence of Islamist vigilante groups in Yogyakarta lies in their role as 'twilight institutions' that can channel citizens into state institutions not only to negotiate basic rights such as employment and public service through violence, patronage, and security businesses, but also to defend an imagined and localised ummah *community.*

In making such arguments, this paper focuses on the role of Islamist groups in Yogyakarta, particularly groups that are loosely associated with the United Development Party (PPP) such as Gerakan Pemuda Kaaba *(Kaaba Youth Movement),* Gerakan Anti Maksiat *(Anti-Vice Movement), and* Laskar Hizbullah *(Hizbullah Troops), as exemplars for elucidating the intersection of identity politics, vigilantism, and citizenship in the local political landscape. Primary data were conducted through in-depth interviews as well as participatory observations between 2014 and 2016.*

Keywords: *Vigilantism, Citizenship, Identity Politics, Islamism*

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Introduction

'*We cannot struggle, do amar-makruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil), do jihad, in a state of hunger. When we are getting bigger and we are still hungry, of course, we will be easy to be tempted by a worldly orientation'* (Ahmad, Interview, June 19[2], 2015).

In an interview during the month of Ramadan in 2015, my colleagues and I were welcomed by several members of *Gerakan Pemuda Kaaba* (henceforth GPK), including a prominent leader whose statement is quoted above, at their headquarters in Ngabean Station at the heart of Yogyakarta. During the interview process, we found that many shuttle buses were busy transporting people, mainly domestic tourists, from the station to the surrounding city. We were quite surprised when Ahmad told us that the shuttle buses, along with the parking areas and several kiosks in and around Ngabean Station, are owned and operated by GPK members. This variety of businesses is integrated into the Ngabean Tourism Union established by GPK in 2007. In addition, the Union also coordinates the management of parking areas in several parts of Yogyakarta.

For many local people, GPK is infamous due to its members' reputations as lawbreakers and its association with thugs, criminals, and turf wars in the city. Meanwhile, many social activists, members of the middle class, and academics have regarded GPK and its associated vigilante groups as a 'threat' to civil liberties, religious freedom, and free speech, all of which are central to Yogyakarta's image as a multicultural city of tolerance. This perception cannot be separated from the numerous acts of vigilantism committed by the GPK members and other militant groups, which have not only targeted such 'minority groups' as Christians, Shi'ites, and Ahmadis, but also threatened public discussions, academic forums, and film screenings. Members frequently justify their actions with the pretext of defending the integrity of the *ummah* community and the Unitary Republic of Indonesia from what they perceive as 'the danger of

2 For ethical and security reasons, all informants' names in this article are pseudonymous.

Communism, Shia, and Liberalism'.

While numerous studies have revealed such groups' 'intolerant acts' in Yogyakarta over the past decade, this study seeks to uncover these organisations' roles in the local context and their complex interplay with state institutions. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) how do Islamist vigilante groups cultivate societal support from local communities and sustain their very existence in the local landscape; (2) how does the complex interplay between Islamist vigilante groups and state institutions occur at the local level?

The data used in this article are derived primarily from research projects, titled 'Islamist Youth Movements in Java' (2014) and 'Does Intolerance always Matter: The Dynamic Co-existence of Pluralism and Radical Islamism in Java' (2015), that were conducted in Yogyakarta and nearby Solo. Some personal observations were also done by the author in 2016 to enrich the primary data, which were collected through in-depth interviews, (participant) observation, and focus group discussions that brought together Islamist and pluralist figures in Yogyakarta.

This article starts by presenting a review of the literature on vigilantism in Indonesia and around the world. Such a literature review is important to locate this study within the constellation of existing studies. Afterwards, this article will briefly recount the local dynamics of Yogyakarta in the post-Suharto era before elaborating on its three salient arguments: *First*, the social practice of Islamist vigilante groups in mobilising societal support from the local community of Yogyakarta by providing employment and security businesses. *Second*, the discourse of localised Islamic populism has been translated into various symbolic and vigilante acts by said actors. *Third,* there has been a complex interplay between Islamist vigilante groups and state institutions at the local level. Finally, the article will end by drawing some conclusions.

Contending Perspectives on Vigilantism in Post-Suharto Indonesia

Democracy in post-Suharto Indonesia has been marked by the persistence and re-emergence of militias, gangs, vigilantes, and street politics that were incorporated within the state machinery during the New Order. These groups have primarily embraced ethnicity, religion, and localism as their symbols and claimed to represent and defend certain communities. Although such groups are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia since 'people troops' were involved in the revolutionary struggle against the Netherlands and the *Pemuda Pancasila* actively promoted the rise of Suharto (see Ryter, 1998; Anderson, 2001; Cribb, 2009), the embrace and elevation of Islam by said groups is a new feature of Indonesia following the fall of Suharto (I. Wilson, 2014). Islam has replaced Pancasila, the national ideology, as the main narrative of such groups[3]. As we know, during the New Order, Pancasila was utilised by various vigilante groups—most notably *Pemuda Pancasila*—to legitimise their acts and predatory businesses, which were ultimately incorporated within the state machinery of the New Order (Ryter, 1998).

The prominence of such identity-based groups, which frequently break the law and disturb public order, has been portrayed as the emergence of 'uncivil society' elements that challenge state authority and threaten democratic values and the very foundations of civil society (see Hefner, 2000, 2016; Beittinger-Lee, 2009; Jones, 2015). Within existing studies, Islamic vigilante groups are regarded as the 'antithesis' of civil society organisations. For instance, Beittenger-Lee (2009, p. 160) defines vigilante groups as a representation of 'uncivil Society' in Indonesia, characterised by the use of force, violence, and undemocratic structures, pursuit of illiberal and anti-democratic agendas, involvement in crime and other illegal activities, and lack of 'civil spirit'. Central to this argument is

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3 However, it should be noted that the existence of Islamic-based troops is not new phenomenon. Since revolutionary struggle of independence, several Islamic-based troops existed such as *Laskar Hizbullah*, *Angkatan Umat Islam*, and various Islamic troops that loosely associated to *Pesantren* and *Kyai.*

that such groups have successfully exploited the weaknesses of the state in pursuing their anti-democratic agendas.

The 'anti-democratic essence' of vigilante groups correspondents with Hefner's (2000) argument that Indonesian democracy is signified by the co-existence of two conflicting and competing forces, namely civil and uncivil society. Notably, within Islamic movements in Indonesia, he points out the remarkable role of Muslim civil associations in consolidating democratic transition and cultivating civic culture, while groups he labels 'uncivil society' (Islamist vigilante and militant groups) are said to have created precarious conditions for minority groups and setbacks for pluralist and nationalist traditions (Hefner, 2016, pp. 62–63). Another scholar and security analyst, Sidney Jones, corroborates Hefner's idea. In her paper *Sisi Gelap Demokrasi: Kekerasan Masyarakat Madani di Indonesia*, Jones (2015) argues that post-Suharto Indonesia has witnessed the emergence of hardliner organisations that exploit democracy for non-democratic goals. She cites the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) as the best example of how such vigilante groups have used non-democratic tools such as threats, force, and violence in pursuing their objectives. In short, for these scholars, vigilante groups are the best examples of an 'uncivil society' that promotes non-democratic agendas in non-democratic ways. Needless to say, these vigilante groups have hindered the flourishing of democratic values and citizenship in post-Suharto Indonesia.

This 'pluralist view' of vigilantism has been challenged by some scholars. It has been criticised for ignoring the material basis of vigilante groups and just focusing on their anti-democratic agendas and methods. For instance, Vedi Hadiz (2010, p.60), using a Marxian political economic approach, regards vigilante groups as 'uncivil society' that defend the political and economic interests of oligarchic elites by operating as vehicles of sub-contracted violence. Meanwhile, Brown and Wilson (2007), based on their research into the Betawi Brotherhood Forum in Jakarta, concludes that instrumental advantages such as economic and political

benefits co-exist with ideological or ethnic-nationalist goals within organisations. Another scholar, Adam Tyson (2013), conducted research into vigilante groups at the local level in Lombok; he argues that vigilante groups such as *Pamswakarsa* have been influential in the dynamics of local politics, as shown by the emergence of political opportunists and power brokers.

Without rejecting the fact that such groups have actually threatened minorities and in some ways defended the interests of elites, both the 'pluralist account' and Marxian view seem unable to comprehend why such groups have successfully garnered local support to sustain their very existence and the complex interplay between state and vigilantism in decentralised Indonesia. More importantly, by just labelling them 'defenders of the oligarchy' or 'anti-democratic movements', we miss the opportunity to look at the complex dynamics of how such groups deal and negotiate with state institutions, especially at the local level. As Telle (2013) and Bakker (2017) have demonstrated, vigilante actors have exercised a particular form of citizenship that conjoins the double logic of democracy and security and champions the societal support of local communities.

As such, it is worth addressing the practices and roles of vigilante groups in their local contexts. This study attempts to complement the work of Telle (2013) and Bakker (2017) by presenting the narratives of Islamic vigilante groups in the local landscape of Yogyakarta. While recognising the importance of citizenship and the security logic behind vigilante groups, as eloquently explained by Telle (2013) and Bakker (2017), neither study not discusses the dimension of religion-based populism within vigilante groups. In Telle's (2013) study, the vigilante acts committed by *Pamswakarsa* in Lombok were enabled using rumours, documents, intimidation, and violence. Meanwhile, in the work of Bakker (2017), the rise of vigilante organisations lies in their ability to utilise a repertoire of citizens' rights and exploit their image as defenders of local communities and Pancasila. This study will link the rise of vigilante

citizenship and Islamic populism in the case of Yogyakarta.

In addition to the social support of local communities, after democratisation began in 1998, far from being static entities, vigilante actors have responded to the material, social, and political constraints which position them contradictorily and ambivalently (I. Wilson, 2015, p. 95). Bakker (2017) conducted a study of the roles of local civil society organisations (*organisasi masyarakat*, or *ormas*) in Indonesia, and he reveals that the very existence of local *ormas* in post-Suharto Indonesia has depended on a repertoire of citizen rights and societal needs combined with the imagery and techniques that organisations such as *Pemuda Pancasila* practised during the New Order regime. As such, vigilante groups—as manifested both in local *ormas* and in religious organisations—have had a complicated relationship with state institutions since the fall of the hegemonic state in 1998.

This complex interplay between the state and these groups, in many ways, lies in their flexibility as 'twilight institutions' that operate in a frontier zone (Abrahams, 1998; Lund, 2006; Sidel, 2001). The term 'twilight institution' is utilised by Lund (2006) to refer to what he sees as the spread of (traditional) institutions in Africa that attempt to exercise public authority or influence the implementation of public goals/the distribution of public authority to reshape and recast local and regional identities. In more extreme situations, such as in some regions in Africa with protracted and prolonged conflict, the management of local security, public services, and resources are run creatively by non-state institutions and society. Some thus suggest that it is 'governance without government' (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus, & Vlassenroot, 2008).

The situation in Indonesia is, of course, different than that in Africa. However, the role of informal institutions that act as 'twilight institutions' in the management of local security and public service is also obvious. Vigilante groups can be defined as 'informal institutions' because they operate between state and society. According to Lund (2001), vigilante groups create particular

authority as alternatives to state authority in collaboration with other social and political forces. Nevertheless, the relationship between vigilante groups and the state is far more complex and ambiguous. They claim and exploit their status as 'non-state' actors in pursuing power and authority, while at the same time using the language of the state (Lund, 2006). Based on their study of youth vigilante groups in southern Nigeria, Pratten and Gore (2003) found a paradoxical relationship between vigilante groups and the state. On the one hand, they view and project themselves as opposing social disorder, advocating the needs of ordinary people, and doing the jobs that the state fails to do. However, on the other hand, these groups do not project a revolutionary and anti-state message, and are frequently the instruments of patrons such as politicians and businessman (Lund, 2006).

Some studies have revealed that vigilante groups have played a significant role in security provision and business in Indonesia. For instance, the works of C.Wilson (2008) and I.Wilson (2008; 2015) on ethnic vigilante groups such as *Forum Betawi Rembug* (FBR) in Jakarta have shown that such a group has played an important and significant role in security arrangements and business in the capital. Another work, by Bakker (2016), suggests that local *ormas* have gained a share of security businesses and local economies by appropriating the discourse of citizens' rights and societal needs. In this regard, it is worth understanding vigilante groups as having 'informal sovereignty', which Hansen and Stepputat (2005) define as referring to the grey areas of political authority that increasingly surround, penetrate, contest, and supplement the spheres of formal authority enjoyed by nation-states.

In addition, to gain social and community support, Islamic vigilante groups have also exercised a particular form of Islamic populism. Here Islamic populism is defined as discourse, articulatory practices to demarcate the 'people' from the 'Other' (Laclau, 2005; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In this regard, the 'people' are regarded as an *ummah* that has been marginalised by secular and decadent elites

in various forms (Hadiz, 2016). In the local context of Yogyakarta, the 'Other' can be manifested in 'minority groups' such as Shi'ites, Ahmadis, Christians, or the ethnic Chinese. The practice of Islamic populism by vigilante groups has been confirmed by I.Wilson (2014), who conducted a study of *Front Pembela Islam* in Jakarta and found that it has exercised what he calls 'populist pragmatic Islamic militancy'. According to I.Wilson (2014), the appeal of this Islamic populism comes not from a comprehensive and coherent ideological or political programme, but rather a particular combination of normative Islamic practices, traditions, and social conservatism, as well as aggressive rhetoric and opportunities for pursuing instrumentalist benefits.

Accordingly, this study focuses on the role of Islamist vigilante groups in cultivating societal support from their local communities and their complex interplay with state institutions. It argues that Islamist vigilante groups have skilfully mobilised societal support from local communities, not just to provide employment and security, but also to defend the integrity of the localised *ummah* community within the discourse of Islamic populism and morality. I suggest that these groups have exercised a particular form of citizenship by championing the societal support of local communities and channelling it into state policies or regulations that benefit their constituencies. These groups have also exercised a particular form of Islamic populism that demarcates the 'people' and the 'Other' in the local landscape of Yogyakarta. In proposing such arguments, this study follows the view that vigilante groups represent 'twilight institutions' and exercise 'informal sovereignty' in dealing with state institutions (Hansen & Stepputat, 2005; Lund, 2006; Migdal, 2001).

City of Tolerance under Threat?

Yogyakarta has always been claimed to be a city of tolerance, the cultural capital of Java, and a centre of education. This claim lies in its socially, ethnically, and religiously diverse society. The image

of Yogyakarta as a 'City of Tolerance' has been promoted to boost tourism and empower the local community. At the beginning of the 2000s, such an image was praised as showing promise for pluralist discourses and practices of citizenship, especially in terms of religion, civic organisations, and politics (Mas'oed, Panggabean, & Azca, 2001, p. 137). Zudianto (2008), a former mayor of Yogyakarta, states that Javanese culture and an open-minded middle class have been the keys to cultivating tolerance and civility in Yogyakarta.

This claim of tolerance was rooted in the civic participation and engagement, urban cosmopolitan culture, and activism of NGOs during the 1980 and 1990s that emerged as a consequence of structural transformation, the positive impact of universities, and cultural exchange in Yogyakarta (Mas'oed et al., 2001). Nowadays, this established image is being challenged by numerous acts of intolerance. According to the Wahid Institute report (2014), Yogyakarta was 'runner up' for the most intolerant city in Indonesia in 2014, with 21 incidents of 154 total incidents reported in Indonesia taking place in the city. According to many NGOs activists, this condition has been caused by the declining role of moderate groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah and the internal crisis within the Sultanate (Rahardjo, Interview, June 10, 2015). Another view holds that the increasing role of Islamic vigilante groups has something to do with the 'internal crisis' inside the centre of power, Keraton Yogyakarta, as related to the issue of succession (Ahnaf & Salim, 2017).

The deteriorated image of tolerance in Yogyakarta is profoundly linked to the increased frequency of acts of vigilantism over the past decade. These acts have taken various forms, ranging from the banning and threatening of public discussions, closing of churches, and organising of public rallies to persecute certain groups such as Shi'ites, Ahmadis, and communists. Unsurprisingly, Islamist vigilante groups are leading proponents behind such actions. According to INFID (2016), the two major players behind the increasing intolerance in Yogyakarta are *Front Jihad Islam* (Islamic

Jihad Front) and *Forum Umat Islam* (Islamic Ummah Forum). However, such Islamist movements are hardly new in Yogyakarta. At the beginning of the 2000s, Yogyakarta was a birthplace of such Islamist movements as *Laskar Jihad* and *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI). These movements played a significant role during the communal conflicts in Ambon and Poso at the beginning of the 2000s, as well as in the broader Islamist movement (Hassan, 2006).

However, the constellation of Islamist movements in Yogyakarta has changed significantly compared to the early years of *Reformasi*. Yogyakarta is no longer the centre of radical Islamist movements in Indonesia. According to Riadi (Interview, August 18, 2014), a social activist and observer of Islamist movements, several factors—including the end of the conflict in Ambon, the eruption of terrorism, and internal fragmentation—have shifted the political landscape. *Laskar Jihad* was dissolved, while MMI is now closer to an 'intellectual movement' that works together with *Hizbut Tahrir* to resist what it calls 'secularism, liberalism, and pluralism'. The decline of *Laskar Jihad* and MMI was followed immediately by the rise of local Islamist vigilante groups. As such, the stage in Yogyakarta is now occupied by several prominent Islamist vigilante groups, including *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah, Gerakan Anti-Maksiat*, and *Laskar Hizbullah*. These groups are loosely connected to the United Development Party (PPP), not organisationally but historically and emotionally.

It should be noted here that, although Yogyakarta was previously seen as an example of pluralism and tolerance, the very existence of Islamic vigilante groups—especially those connected to PPP—is not an entirely new phenomenon. One of the most (in)famous such groups in Yogyakarta is *Gerakan Pemuda Kaaba* (GPK). Founded by several young PPP activists, including Alfian Darmawan, Fauzi AR, and Syukri Fadholi in Jakarta in 1982 (Asgar, 2003), GPK gained public attention in Yogyakarta between 1998 and 2000. GPK's establishment in Yogyakarta was intended to provide political support for PPP during electoral contestations,

which were becoming increasingly heated due to the emergence of new Islamic or Islam-based parties such as *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (National Awakening Party), *Partai Amanat Nasional* (National Mandate Party), *Partai Bulan Bintang* (Crescent Party), *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party), and *Partai Kebangkitan Umat* (Ummah Awakening Party) (Saputro, 2016). Although its original aim was to politically support the existence of PPP in Yogyakarta, as we will further discuss, over time GPK's activities have not necessarily been in line with PPP's policies at the national and regional level.

Providing Employment, Championing Local Support

Islamist vigilante groups are widely cited as the main actors behind the increased occurrence of intolerant incidents in Yogyakarta. Numerous annual reports from NGOs such as the Wahid Institute, Setara Institute, INFID, and Centre for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) have mentioned the involvement of these groups in various incidents in recent years. Among the most cited actors are *Front Jihad Islam, Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah, Gerakan Anti-Maksiat, Front Pembela Islam*, and *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia.* While there is abundant evidence and numerous studies of those groups' vigilante and intolerant acts, the roles of such movements in local communities and how they appeal to certain social groups (such as youths and urban poor) have largely been overlooked. This section focuses on this neglected dimension of Islamist vigilante groups. My argument here is that Islamist vigilante groups have skilfully mobilised a degree of social support from local communities by providing employment for local people and acting as 'twilight institutions' that can channel their constituents into state institutions and policies. In doing so, I look at the developments and roles of *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah* and its offshoots such as *Gerakan Anti-Maksiat* and *Laskar Hizbullah* in their respective local communities.

Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah, or GPK, is not a new organisation

in Yogyakarta. As mentioned above, it is infamous among local residents due to its reputation for turf wars, petty crime, and annoying rallies during campaign periods. In 2000, GPK gained notoriety for its attack on an LGBT meeting organised by the Indonesian Gay Society (IGS) in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, (Asgar, 2003); this event became known as ‘Kaliurang Berdarah’. In the latest incident, in 2016, GPK attacked Mantijeron Village and damaged several motor vehicles and houses, seeking revenge after a GPK sympathiser was allegedly attacked by local villagers. GPK is also notorious for its frequent attacks on what it perceives as ‘dens of vice’ (*tempat maksiat*) such as gambling places, bars, and nightclubs. GPK’s leaders are well aware of their bad reputation and have attempted to remedy it with a more sympathetic approach. For instance, GPK donated food to the survivors of flooding in Kulonprogo and to prisoners in Yogyakarta (Kadir, 2011). GPK members also frequently organise Islamic services in various mosques in Yogyakarta. Such moves are designed to rehabilitate GPK’s reputation, particularly among the local people of Yogyakarta.

However, it was not until 2007 that GPK’s new approach gained momentum. In this regard, Ahmad’s story about the organisation’s new strategy is essential. After a difficult period at the beginning of the 2000s, GPK members created the ‘Ngabean Tourism Union’. Ngabean is a district located in the heart of Yogyakarta City and close to such prominent tourist sites as Malioboro Street, Kraton, and the City Square (*Alun-Alun*). According to Ahmad’s story, the Union’s establishment was intended to improve the economic condition of members. There was an understanding among GPK’s leaders that, without economic security, members would be easily tempted by worldly orientations. Given its strategic position at the heart of Yogyakarta City, GPK has successfully advanced a ‘new economic strategy’. It has built kiosks and stores, managed new parking areas, and initiated shuttle busses for tourists. Recently, Ahmad claimed that they employ more than one hundred people. The Union also runs seventy-eight kiosks and several parking areas

in several strategic areas of Yogyakarta, such as in Gembira Loka Zoo, Abu Bakar Ali Mosque, and the City Square.

The success of GPK's businesses might lie in the organisation's ability to capitalise on local support and utilise it as a powerful bargaining chip in its political negotiations with state institutions and local elites. Such a proposition is probably best reflected in Ahmad's remark when he described GPK's strategy for developing its business activities:

> 'I collected support from fellow Muslims, the mosque youth, then created an association and wrote a letter to the government demanding that the management of the parking area not be given to the private sector. This (parking area) should be given to empower a local community. Therefore, Keraton or the provincial government or the city council cannot resist when they are facing a local community' (Ahmad, interview, June 19, 2015).

It was evident that Ahmad and his fellow GPK members were well aware of the compelling claim of representing local communities in dealing with state institutions. In addition to its claim of representation, GPK's move in informal business is deeply rooted in territorial control. In this respect, GPK's social bases in densely populated majority-Muslim areas, such as Kauman, Karangkajen, Kuncen, Kotagedhe, and Notoprajan, have played key roles in providing and preserving local support. In these villages, there is a cultural claim that those villages should be preserved as the 'Muslim villages', meaning that all inhabitants should be Muslim.

Nevertheless, there has always been a politics of patronage paving the way for GPK's business activities. One of its most important patrons in Yogyakarta is Fathoni, a former chairman of the United Development Party in Yogyakarta. Between 2001 and 2006, Fathoni occupied a very strategic position in the Yogyakarta Government. This experience as a prominent public figure gave Fathoni political influence and connections with local elites in Yogyakarta. Fathoni himself admitted that, when he invited GPK's members to organise parking areas in Ngabean, his initiative was driven by the need to provide them with '*halal*' employment.

According to him, at the time it was common for GPK members to be employed in nightclubs and other 'dens of vice' that are considered as '*haram'*. He further said that he only served to 'negotiate' between GPK members, the mayor of Yogyakarta, and his administration. In fact, Fathoni has been far more than a negotiator in GPK; he is probably one of its most respected senior figures, a protector and advisor. Such an important role is frequently apparent when GPK members are involved in legal problems. Fathoni will always be at the forefront, defending and negotiating with the police and authorities to release them. In short, the flourishing of GPK's informal business activities has been a product of maintaining local support, controlling territoriality, and the politics of patronage.

GPK is not the only Islamist vigilante group that has built local support from managing businesses in the informal sector. Another vigilante group that has cultivated social and local support by managing informal businesses is *Gerakan Anti-Maksiat* (GAM), which is headquartered on Wanasari Street, Bantul Regency. According to Riadi (2014), GAM is now probably the most significant Islamist group in Yogyakarta in terms of membership and street presence. Its charismatic leader, Salman, was vice chairman of GPK's Yogyakarta branch and had a long career in the militia. Despite originating from GPK, GAM members and leaders are critical and often cynical about the role of PPP and GPK in Yogyakarta. Unlike GPK, GAM has no formal structure and relies heavily on Salman's personal leadership. GAM has been involved in numerous incidents of intolerance in Yogyakarta, ranging from threatening public discussions and movie screenings, attacking nightclubs, and patrolling entertainment sites. What is fascinating about GAM is it has also followed GPK's approach to cultivating local support by providing employment and economic benefits. GAM has a travel agency in its headquarters and manages parking areas in several areas in Yogyakarta, as well as stores and restaurants (Riadi, 2014). According to Salman (Interview, November 17, 2015), GAM also has assets like five-a-side football fields (*futsal*) and plans to build a

water park in Banguntapan, Bantul.

The last group is *Laskar Hizbullah,* which is located in Jogokaryan District. As with the two previous groups, *Laskar Hizbullah* has roots in the United Development Party. However, unlike GAM, which is trying to keep its distance from the party, *Laskar Hizbullah* members still frequently identify themselves with PPP in their activities. The organisation is profoundly linked with the Jogokaryan Mosque, which is located at the heart of Yogyakarta City. Arguably the most active and dynamic mosque in Yogyakarta, Jogokaryan Mosque has not been acknowledged for its excellent modern management but also its role as a place for various Islamist groups to gather and to organise their activities. The moque's respected leader, Ustadz Jazir, is a prominent local figure and one of the advisors of Sultan Hamengkubuwana X. Jazir is the most respected figure in Jogokaryan Mosque, as well as the political patron of *Laskar Hizbullah*. Given the enormous influence of Jazir and his mosque, *Laskar Hizbullah* is arguably part of the mosque's wider movement. The mosque has been prominent in developing a broad range of socio-economic activities, such as Islamic publishing, creative industries, hotels, stores, motivation training events, and venues. Its location at the centre of Yogyakarta City, where many foreign tourists stay, makes Jogokaryan a perfect place for tourism-based businesses to flourish.

A Localised Version of Islamic Populism

It seems that all three of these organisations have shared a common feature, namely the ability to exploit economic resources to garner support from their respective local communities. They have skilfully provided employment, financial safety, and material benefits for their constituents. It would be tempting to conclude that such organisations simply offer instrumental benefits, with religion a mask to justify it. In fact, they do not only provide material advantages, but also offer an identity and symbolism that

is strongly connected with the idea of Islamic populism. In many ways, these groups have exercised Islamic populist discourse. In their various activities, such as Islamic proselytisation, public rallies, demonstrations, and training, discourse that emphasises the primacy of a 'marginalised *ummah*' over the 'Other' have been widespread. The 'Other', here, can be loosely defined as including the ethnic Chinese, Shi'ites, communists, liberals, and Christians.

These Islamist vigilante groups have been active in campaigning against the danger of the 'Other' through various activities, including public rallies, sermons, and declarations. For instance, on 15 May 2015, such Islamist groups as GPK, MMI, FKAM, and FJI held a public rally together with along with other lascar at the northern City Square. During this rally, which took the tagline 'Yogyakarta without Shia', numerous speakers warned about what they called 'the danger of a resurgence of Shia and communists'. Posters and pamphlets campaigning against Shi'ites and communists were also widespread in Yogyakarta's streets. Meanwhile, Christians and the ethnic Chinese have been blamed for the internal conflict within the Sultanate and the massive and unjust development in Yogyakarta.

The discourse of Islamic populism cannot be built merely upon the instrumental opportunities; it also needs a more ideological backbone and conducive community to flourish. Islamist vigilante groups such as GPK, GAM, and *Laskar Hizbollah* have dedicated many of their resources to building an imagined *ummah* community in their respective constituencies. GPK can be said to be the most systematic and to have tried to capture the broadest supporter base. As Ahmad (2015) eloquently explained, GPK has systematically attempted to develop a variety of 'branch organisations' for different targeted constituencies. He said GPK has created three organisations to support its goals: Moslem Green Zone, *Forum Umat Islam*, and *Forum Ukhuwah Islamiyah*. The first group is focused on junior and senior high school students, primarily those who lived in such 'Muslim villages' as Kauman, Suronatan, Notoprajan, Krapyak, Mlangi, Nitikan, Kuncen, and Karang Kajen. The second group was

formed for youths and intended to respond to local dynamics and issues. The last group, meanwhile, focuses on the older generations and includes senior Islamic clerics and figures.

According to one GPK member, these three branches have different functions and constituencies. However, in reality, they are all merged into one community, seemingly without any clear-cut boundaries. Likewise, GAM and *Laskar Hizbollah* have tried to develop their constituencies through a community approach. GAM routinely organises Islamic sermons that attract hundreds of local people (Salman, 2014), while *Laskar Hizbollah* members are involved in a broad range of Islamic activities at Jogokaryan Mosque, including proselytisation, Islamic celebrations, and other informal activities. All of these communities can converge together into one umbrella organisation when needed to defend the integrity of the *ummah*. As I. Wilson (2014, p. 66) has rightly pointed out, the resilience and rising appeal of Islamist vigilante organisations lies in their ability to accommodate various interests and grievances using the language of Islamic militancy while at the same time providing instrumental opportunities at the daily level.

It is evident that Islamist vigilante groups have not only provided material benefits and opportunities for their constituents, but also built up a sense of a single shared community through various activities. In this respect, this reflects the findings of Brown and Wilson (2007), who showed the conflation of pursuing instrumental advantages and ideological or ethnoreligious rights in a Betawi vigilante group in Jakarta. While their study found the coexistence of two perceived contradictory elements in this ethnicised group, my study has found that such a proposition is also found in religious organisations, which have defined a shared community called the '*ummah*'. As communities defined by faith, they have evolved a sense of solidarity and reinforced an identity based on a specific construction of meaning, symbolism, and social practices. In this regard, it should be noted that their imagined *ummah* is profoundly bound up with local dynamics, rather than the

national or international imagination.

Local dynamics and issues seem to be more important for these organisations, which prioritise issues such as vice, blasphemy, Christianisation, and defending local communities. However, this does not mean that they do not respond to national and international issues. The slaughter of Muslims in Burma, as well as the blasphemy case of former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), have attracted their attention, but are less important than local issues. In addition, none of these movements has shown interest in expanding into other cities or areas. In short, the discourse of Islamic populism operates at the local level and relies on control over territory and neighbourhoods.

Vigilant Citizens and the State

Islamist vigilante organisations are able to cultivate the popular support of their local communities, which is essential for their negotiations with their patrons as well as with state institutions. The modality of popular mandate is a powerful means for political negotiation. As Bakker (2017, pp. 130–131) reveals in his study, vigilante organisations have the ability to balance the interests of the population and established patrons by cultivating local support and negotiating with elites. In the case of Yogyakarta, Islamist vigilante groups are regarded by constituents as local and accessible providers of employment and security. Meanwhile, established patrons need these organisations to gather voters, popular support, and informal power.

This proposition is perhaps best reflected in GPK's strategy of establishing the Ngabean Union, which encompasses a variety of informal business activities. It was evident that GPK members were able to mobilise the support of their respective communities through the discourse of 'community empowerment' and Islamic populism. This discourse was effective even when confronted with the private sector in an open tender authorised by the local

government. GPK has defeated the private sector in public bids for the management of parking areas in several places in Yogyakarta. The power of local community support was reflected when the writer attended one of FUI's Islamic sermons, a religious event that was also attended by a local Member of Parliament from PPP. At the time, many GPK members asked the legislator about the permit mechanism for establishing hotels in Yogyakarta, which they felt functioned covertly as 'dens of vice'. They also demanded that the government and parliament 'decisively act' against those who try to poison the morality of the younger generation. In response, the legislator explained his party's efforts to combat such 'vice events' and resist 'Western values', including its rejection of a sex education model proposed by a Netherlands-based NGO.

In addition to championing local support, Islamist vigilantes also rely on the threat of violence in nurturing their relationship with state institutions. This threat of violence is justified both in the name of maintaining order and in the name of defending the integrity of the *ummah*. Attacks on 'dens of vice' such as nightclubs, cafes that sell alcohol, and raves, as well as minority groups as Shiites, were justified with the pretext of maintaining social order and defending Islamic values. Interestingly, rather than threatening state authority, these movements frequently work hand in hand with state apparatuses. For instance, in 2013, GAM—together with the Islamic Jihad Front and Indonesian Mujahideen Council—organised a workshop titled 'Anti-Vice Movement' that was attended by the Bantul police chief and as well as several district-level police officials. In May 2015, FUI-led mujahedeen training in Kaliurang was also attended by Yogyakarta's chief of police. Moreover, in various vigilante operations, these organisations claimed to always coordinate with police authorities. This 'cooperation' is frequently justified in the name of preserving stability and maintaining a mutual relationship between state and society.

This narrative demonstrates that the state and its authority is far from unified and monolithic, an entity that in the Weberian

tradition monopolises violence. Rather, the exercise of and resistance to state power is far more complicated and frequently constituted and reconstituted in multiple and contradictory ways (Barker, 2006, p. 204). In this regard, vigilante groups are perhaps best considered 'twilight institutions' that operate in the boundary between state and society, public and private (Lund, 2006, p. 686). It follows Abraham's (1998, p. 9) suggestion that vigilantism does not challenge state authority; rather, it simply attempts to deal directly with 'offenders'. In various interviews, organisation members have always insisted on 'cooperating' with the police when dealing with what they perceived as 'dens of vice'. Also, it is not uncommon for these groups to issue joint letters of cooperation with local police when dealing with particular cases.

In the case of Yogyakarta, the threat of violence is strategic and powerful, as the city's economy relies heavily on tourism, which requires stability and security. Yogyakarta is the second most popular destination for international tourists in Indonesia, after Bali, and its tourism targets have increased significantly in recent years. For instance, in 2015, Yogyakarta was visited by more than 3.8 million domestic tourists and more than 290,000 international visitors (Mandriana, 2016). This surpassed the government's target. The growth of the tourism industry in Yogyakarta is also reflected in the massive and uncontrolled development of hotels, restaurants, and entertainment sites over the past few years—something that has been widely criticised by environmental activists, human rights activists, and broader civil society proponents.

Islamist vigilante groups are well aware of this fact, an awareness manifested in their strategic move to mobilise local support and use of threats of violence in dealing with the state. While I have described the first move earlier, the second move is evident in the Islamist vigilantes' awareness of the need for guaranteed security in Yogyakarta. For example, one of the senior figures within this lascar told me that the threat of violence against international tourists is a very powerful tool when negotiating the release of group members

from police custody (Suryanto, personal communication, August 31, 2015).

Conclusion

The narrative above has attempted to understand the complicated relationship between the emergence of Islamist vigilante groups, their role in local communities, and their interplay with state institutions. It has made three main arguments: (1) the growing appeal of Islamic vigilante groups in Yogyakarta lies in these groups' ability to provide their members with instrumental benefits, as manifested in their security businesses and development activities; (2) these groups have been able to combine the provision of material benefits with the enforcement of a localised version of Islamic populism; (3) their relationship with the state is far more complex than simply challenging it; they might be best regarded as 'twilight' institutions that operate within the blurred boundary between state and society, legal and illegal, public and private.

The resilience of organisations such as *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah, Gerakan Anti Maksiat*, and *Laskar Hizbullah* lies in their provision of instrumental benefits and enforcement of a localised version of Islamic populism. In the local landscape of Yogyakarta, the material benefits that they offer have manifested by providing employment for members, such as by managing parking areas, unions, tourism-based businesses, travel agencies, kiosks, and of course security businesses. At the same time, they project a discourse of Islamic populism by emphasising a single *ummah* community that should be defended and guarded. This discourse constitutes the 'people' as the marginalised *ummah*, while the 'Other' is loosely defined as the Chinese, Christians, Shiites, or communists. These two factors have enabled them to garner a degree of social support from their local communities. Through their success in cultivating and championing local support, they are able to negotiate with established local political elites as well as state institutions in order to advance their agendas.

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